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Tim W Hayes 02/23/2007 03:07:38 PM From DB/Inbox: Tim W Hayes

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Text:

C O N F I D E N T I A L ANKARA 00387

SIPDIS
CX:

ACTION: POL
INFO: CONS TSR PMA ECON DCM AMB RAO FCS PA MGT DAO

DISSEMINATION: POL /1
CHARGE: PROG

APPROVED: AMB:RWILSON
DRAFTED: POL:DBURGER
CLEARED: POL:JGWEINER, PMA: MNARDI, DCM:NMCELDOWNEY

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RHMFISS/HQ USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL PRIORITY
RHMFISS/425ABS IZMIR TU//CC// PRIORITY
RHMFISS/39ABG INCIRLIK AB TU PRIORITY
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ANKARA 000387

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 02/19/2017
TAGS: [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [PGOV](#) [TU](#) [IZ](#)
SUBJECT: TURKISH GOVERNMENT AND MILITARY CLASH OVER
CONTACTS WITH IRAQI KURDS

Classified By: Ambassador Wilson for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

11. (C) Summary: A dispute between Turkey's military and government over contacts with Iraqi Kurdish leaders is threatening to scuttle an already twice-postponed meeting between FonMin Gul and KRG PM Nechirvan Barzani. The military, even more than the political opposition, will attempt to use this issue to portray PM Erdogan's government as soft on PKK terrorism and Kirkuk in this election year. End summary.

12. (C) The civilian GOT and Turkey's military leadership are at loggerheads over the issue of senior contacts with the Iraqi Kurds. The GOT's Special Envoy on the PKK, GEN (r) Edip Baser, started the debate by suggesting in a television interview Feb. 7 that talking to Iraqi Kurdish leaders about the PKK problem was "not a Turkish redline." Baser underscored that these contacts would have to be useful, and that whether or not hold such a meeting would not be his decision. CHOD GEN Buyukanit shot down Baser's trial balloon in comments to the press on Feb. 12. The CHOD said that the

Iraqi Kurdish leadership has made "hostile statements" against Turkey, and that meeting them would not be appropriate. Buyukanit believes that the KRG leadership -- in calling for a "political" solution to the PKK problem rather than taking direct action to shut them down or cut off lanes of supply -- offers succor to a terrorist organization.

¶3. (C) Baser had theretofore refused to meet Iraqi Kurdish officials, so his Feb. 7 remarks seemed at the time to signal a possible reversal in his views. However, Baser subsequently informed us that he would not meet with KRG officials, even by DVC.

¶4. (C) A GOT-TGS tit-for-tat game ensued. PM Erdogan told reporters Feb. 14 that as long as dialogue with the Iraqi Kurds brought results, there was no reason not to meet them. Buyukanit in turn told the press at the end of his visit to Washington Feb. 16 that the PUK and KDP provide support to the PKK, and he would not meet with them. However, he did add that "political contacts" were allowable. FonMin Gul responded Feb. 17 that the military should allow politicians and diplomats to do their work, and that the GOT had an obligation to talk to all groups in northern Iraq.

¶5. (C) On Feb. 21, a press story appeared claiming that Turkish intelligence has learned that the KDP and PUK plan to use the PKK in Kirkuk to frustrate Turkish interests there. It is possible that the military and others who disapprove of GOT-KRG dialogue were behind it. True or not, the story is likely intended to inflame Turkish opinion on these hot-button issues, and it will further squeeze the government as it attempts outreach to the Iraqi Kurds.

¶6. (C) This public debate comes against the backdrop of FonMin Gul's plans -- not yet known to the public -- to meet KRG PM Nechirvan Barzani in Turkey in an "informal" capacity. Regrettably, Gul has twice had to postpone the meeting, initially set for Feb. 3 and then Feb. 17, due to urgent travel requirements. Turkish MFA officials insist that these delays were for legitimate reasons and not intended to send a negative message to the Iraqi Kurds, but GOT Special Envoy for Iraq Celikkol acknowledged to the Ambassador Feb. 19 that the public dispute between the GOT and the military, which undoubtedly knows about the planned meeting, may make rescheduling the meeting difficult. Celikkol said the National Security Council would discuss the issue at its Feb. 23 meeting.

¶7. (C) Ambassador told Gul at their Feb. 16 meeting that GOT-KRG dialogue is important, and that we believe Gul's meeting with Nechirvan Barzani should be rescheduled as soon as possible; he repeated this message to Celikkol. Celikkol agreed, but added that especially given the recent controversy there will be high expectations among the Turkish public for concrete gestures from the Iraqi Kurds on the PKK and/or Kirkuk. If Barzani only comes prepared to talk about economic cooperation, this will be problematic. Ambassador warned against Turkey raising a high bar for contacts with the KRG. Celikkol acknowledged that Turkey does not expect this first meeting to solve all outstanding issues, but that in order to regularize this dialogue Barzani must come with some positive message.

¶8. (C) Comment: Why Gul postponed his Feb. 17 meeting with Barzani is now almost beside the point. The question of contacts with the Iraqi Kurdish leadership has become a domestic political and civil-military issue. For the TGS, the KRG is providing safe haven for a terrorist organization, so talk is out of the question. The GOT prefers to cast it as a matter of politics, pragmatism, and dealing with neighbors. Primarily the military, but also the political opposition, will likely seek to exploit this rift and "expose" the Erdogan government as soft on terrorism and on Kirkuk as presidential elections approach. It is one of many areas where the military, acting in lieu of a viable political opposition, is drawing a line in the sand. Whether the government still feels it has enough maneuvering space to carry out dialogue with the Iraqi Kurds is an open question.

We will continue to push the Turks in the right direction.
End comment.

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WILSON